

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method of electronically handling transactions, comprising the steps of:

establishing a transaction identifier that is used during all stages of an order-to-cash trading cycle;

electronically storing the transaction identifier such that the identifier is remotely accessible by a plurality of users;

linking supplier information with the transaction identifier;

linking purchaser information with the transaction identifier;

updating status information indicating the status of the transaction during a corresponding phase of the transaction; and

linking the status information to the transaction identifier.

2. The method of claim 1, including automatically providing at least selected portions of the information linked to the transaction identifier to a user.

3. The method of claim 1, including providing at least selected portions of the information linked to the transaction identifier to a user responsive to the user accessing the transaction identifier.

4. The method of claim 1, including automatically facilitating payment from a customer to a supplier responsive to determining that a selected portion of the transaction is complete.

5. The method of claim 4, including automatically determining payment schedule terms based upon selected criteria using the determined completion of the selected portion of the transaction.

6. The method of claim 1, including automatically updating the status information responsive to remotely received information regarding stages of the transaction.

7. A system for electronically processing transactions, comprising:
a transaction identifier that identifies a transaction; and
a tracking module that includes status information regarding the transaction and updates the status information during stages of the transaction, the tracking module providing access to the status information to a plurality of users such that a user of the system can automatically access the status information by using the transaction identifier.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein the transaction identifier comprises a single bar code representing a number.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the transaction identifier includes information identifying a customer, a purchase order number, shipment release number and packing slip number.

10. The system of claim 7, including a customer module that includes information regarding at least one customer, the customer module facilitating the tracking module obtaining information regarding the customer and the status of the transaction where the status relates to the customer, the customer module linking the customer information with the transaction identifier.

11. The system of claim 10, including a supplier module that includes information regarding at least one supplier, the supplier module facilitating the tracking module obtaining information regarding the supplier and the status of the transaction where the status relates to the supplier, the supplier module linking the supplier information with the transaction identifier.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the tracking, customer and supplier modules all each communicate with the other modules.

13. The system of claim 11, wherein the tracking, customer and supplier modules are each located remotely from the other modules.

14. The system of claim 7, wherein the tracking module communicates with a plurality of remotely located input devices and where the input devices provide status information regarding the transaction.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein at least one of the input devices is a shipper input device that a shipper uses to enter status information regarding the shipment and delivery portions of the transaction.

16. The system of claim 7, including a billing module that communicates with the tracking module and wherein the billing module automatically facilitates fund transfers between a customer account and a supplier account responsive to receiving shipment confirmation information from the tracking module.

17. The system of claim 7, wherein the tracking module comprises software.

18. A computer readable medium containing a plurality of computer executable instructions for electronically processing transactions, comprising:
- a first instruction module establishing a transaction identifier that is used during all stages of a transaction;
 - a second instruction module electronically storing the transaction identifier such that the identifier is remotely accessible by a plurality of users;
 - a third instruction module linking supplier information with the transaction identifier;
 - a fourth instruction module linking purchaser information with the transaction identifier;
 - a fifth instruction module updating status information indicating the status of the transaction during a corresponding phase of the transaction;
 - a sixth instruction module linking the status information to the transaction identifier; and
 - a seventh instruction module automatically providing at least selected portions of the information linked to the transaction identifier responsive to a user accessing the transaction identifier.